

# Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

## Pickett State Park's Hidden Passage Trail is a Wonderful Winter Trek

By Fran Wallas

When most of Tennessee has lost its greenery, in Jamestown, Pickett State Parks' Hidden Passage Trail is lined with the green of laurel, huckleberry, teaberry, and rhododendron.

There aren't enough adjectives to describe the beauty of this Civilian Conservation Corps built 10-mile loop trail that winds through Pickett State Park and State Forest.

The trail starts at the Sheltoewe Trace sign. Hidden Passage Trail is the southern end of the Sheltoewe Trace National Recreation Trail that runs 278 miles through Kentucky's Red River Gorge. Follow the trail until you come to a split. Don't take the left turn to the group camp. Continue straight ahead following the Hidden Passage sign and the blazes that are either green metal diamonds or green rounds with a silver hiker.

The first fun stop is a bench built in a sandstone hollow not big enough to be called a cave or rock house. You may want to keep hiking until you get to the grand rock houses further along the trail. The rock houses are great shelters from the wind on a cold day. Just at the bench the trail turns right. Further along, you will notice a side trail on your right to Crystal Falls. The side trail is short and steep so be careful if the rocks are iced over. The falls are beautiful anytime of the year so you may want to wait for the thaw.

Each time the trail disappears into a rock house, you will follow it until it

leaves the rock house on your right.

There are two well-marked spur trails for interesting short side trips. One goes to double falls and one goes to an old rail-road tunnel that is now closed for safety reasons. Because winter days are short and the trail is long, you may want to save the spur trails for another day.

About half way around the loop you come to the Thompson Overlook. This large sandstone bluff is a great place to enjoy the views in all directions. It is easy to take a wrong turn at this point. Don't start hiking up the dirt road. The trail stays near the bluff and reenters the woods. If you do turn up the road, you will immediately come to a small wood sign that says, "trail." The arrow will point back behind you. Turn around and look for the green diamond blaze.

The trail winds through the woods and leads to an open area under power lines. Walk directly across the open grassy area under the power lines until you get to the continuation of the trail on the other side. The trail eventually comes to a junction with a road and a sign leading left to Rock Creek. Instead you will turn to your right and follow the gravel road past the volleyball net in the group camp. The gravel road ends in a paved road that goes behind the group camp buildings. Continue until you get to a Hidden Passage sign pointing left. You may think that you have



George Halton

Along the Hidden Passage Trail at Pickett State Park in Jamestown, Crystal Falls is seen in the snow.

passed the scenic part of the trail, but there are still some beautiful rock walls. You even cross a very tiny natural bridge. The trail dead ends back at the sign leading to group camp that you saw when you started your hike. Turn right and follow the trail back to the parking lot. Before you reach the car, you will be planning a return trip in the spring to see the wildflowers and the spur trails that you missed.

### Directions

**Directions to the Hidden Passage trail-head:** Take I-40 to Crossville exit 317. Follow Highway 127 north for 46 miles. Turn right on HWY 154 and go 12 miles to the park entrance. The park office has trail maps. Park campgrounds are open all year. If you want to backpack, you must get a free permit from the park office. In winter, this trail is rated moderate because of the cold, length of trail and possible slippery conditions. The trailhead is a little north of the park office on highway 154. You will see the small parking lot on your right.

#### Pickett State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville.)

This bench built in a sandstone hollow is one of the stops along the Hidden Passage Trail in Pickett State Park in Jamestown.



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